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ABSTRACT

Stakeholders in Taiwan's process for reviewing and approving senior vocational school (SVS) textbooks were surveyed to identify ways of improving the process. The questionnaire contained items examining respondents' demographic characteristics, their opinions of Taiwan's existing SVS textbook review and approval process, and suggestions for revising it. It was mailed to all 88 of Taiwan's SVS textbook publishers and 148 SVS textbook reviewers who were randomly selected from the reviewer database of Taiwan's National Institute for Compilation and Translation (NICT). Responses were received from 54 (61.4%) of the publishers and 125 (84.5%) of the reviewers. A majority of respondents supported 11 of 12 of Taiwan's current SVS textbook review and approval policies. Approval rates for selected suggestions regarding improving the review and approval process were as follows: all textbook manuscripts of the same subject that is offered for more than 1 semester must be submitted for review simultaneously, 60.5%; textbook manuscripts must be typed for review, 80.2%; detailed evaluation criteria must be developed and followed, 56.3%; and all textbook licenses should have the same valid period (4 years), 42.4%. (A flowchart illustrating the SVS textbook review and approval processes managed by Taiwan's NICT and Ministry of Education is included.) (MN)

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Approaches to Improving the Senior-vocational-school Textbook Review-and-approval Process in Taiwan

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Abstract

In Taiwan, curriculum standards for senior-vocational schools (SVS's) are determined and promulgated by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Edited by publishers and compiled on the basis of the curriculum standard, every SVS textbook must pass the review-and-approval process managed by the National Institute for Compilation and Translation (NICT), MOE. In order to improve the review-and-approval process, the author conducted a questionnaire survey to gather opinions on the process from main stockholders. As result of this survey, the following conclusions have been made: (1) The current SVS textbook review-and-approval process may be considered appropriate, but dialogue, such as symposiums, between publishers and reviewers and even authors should be fostered. (2) "Textbook manuscripts must be typed for review" and "detailed evaluation criteria must be developed and followed" should be implemented. (3) "All textbook manuscripts of the same subject which is offered for more than one semester must be simultaneously submitted for review" and "all textbook licenses should have the same validity (four years)" may be considered, but a mutual understanding or compromise should be sought between the two groups--reviewers and reviewees/publishers.

Introduction and Purposes

In recent years, calls for educational reform have proliferated in Taiwan. School textbooks occupy a highly visible position in these calls for reform. As part of the educational process, textbooks have become the main instructional material in Taiwan. In this country, SVS[1] textbooks, as well as other elementary- and secondary-school textbooks, must be edited and reviewed on the basis of the curriculum standards which are determined and promulgated by the MOE. The NICT, MOE has managed the review-and-approval process shown in the Appendix. In order to review and improve this process, the author conducted a questionnaire survey to gather opinions from main stakeholders (publishers/reviewees and reviewers) on the process. In short, the purposes of this paper are: (1) to summarize the current review-and-approval process, (2) to present main stakeholders' opinions on the review-and-approval process, and (3) to suggest approaches to improving the review-and-approval process.

Conceptual Bases and Significance of This Study

As shown in the Appendix, the SVS textbook review-and-approval process managed by the NICT may be summarized as follows: After the publisher's sent-in textbook manuscripts are determined to meet the review regulations which mainly require that both the title and structure of the textbook must be in line with the curriculum standard, the manuscripts are sent to two external reviewers, mainly college-level faculty. If deemed acceptable as SVS textbooks by both reviewers, the manuscripts will be suggested to be approved after underlying minor changes based on the reviewers' suggestions, and sent to the final review committee which is

organized by the NICT department heads and concentrates on the "process" review. If judged unacceptable for SVS textbook by both reviewers, the manuscripts will be suggested to be rejected and sent to the final review committee. If there is disagreement between the two reviewers, then a third external reviewer will be engaged to give a determining opinion. Once approved by the final review committee, based on the suggestions from the Department of Technical and Vocational School Textbooks (DTVST), NICT, the manuscripts will be licensed and priced by the NICT, and published by the publishers. The license for SVS textbooks is valid for four to six years (four years for technical subjects such as mechanics or introduction to computers; and six years for general subjects such as languages or math) (NICT, 1997).

For years, some have pointed out problems with the process such as the evaluation form offered to reviewers by the NICT being too open-ended. It may collect more objective and relevant opinions on these problems from stakeholders in the review-and-approval process. The publisher, reviewer, and NICT are obviously main stakeholders in the process, so the author, who is an NICT administrator, conducted this study to collect opinions and suggest approaches to improvement.

Procedures and Methods

The questionnaire consisted of three parts: the respondent's demographic data, his/her opinions on the current review-and-approval process[2], and suggestions for improving the review-and-approval process[3]. Questionnaires were mailed to the following subjects--all 88 SVS textbook publishers, and 148 SVS textbook reviewers who were randomly selected from the NICT's reviewer database in May 1997. After an all-non-respondent letter follow-up and some telephone calls, the survey obtained valid questionnaires from 54 (61.4% of 88 subjects) publishers and 125 (84.5% of 148 subjects) reviewers. The demographic data of those respondents who returned questionnaires after the follow-up, which might be considered to be similar to non-respondents' data, and the demographic data of those respondents who returned questionnaires before the follow-up was compared by means of a two-way chi-square (χ^2) test. This comparison result indicates no significant difference between non-respondents' characteristics and those of respondent ($p > .05$). To analyze the collected objective data, all responses on valid questionnaires were coded and keyed into computer files and a two-way chi-square was used to compare opinions given by the two subject groups, publishers and reviews.

Findings

The following significant findings were obtained from the analysis of the data:

Opinions of Publishers and Reviewers on the Current Review-and-Approval Process

The majority of total respondents positively supported the following 11 of 12 current policies listed to ask for comments (appended is the percentage of the majority

and the total number of respondents on this item):

1. Textbook review applications must be submitted to the NICT at least one year prior to publication. (48.6%, N=177)
2. Instructor's guides and student workbooks are not required when submitting textbook manuscripts for review. (45.5%, N=176)
3. Every textbook manuscript is reviewed by two college-level teachers and recommended for "approval after minor changes," "rejection," or "request third review" based on the two reviewers' reports. (75.0%, N=176)
4. Evaluation guidelines but not detailed criteria are listed on the evaluation form. (41.4%, N=169)
5. The license for SVS general-subject textbooks remains valid for six years. (48.6%, N=175)
6. The license for SVS technical-subject textbooks remains valid for four years. (58.8%, N=177)
7. Approved textbook manuscripts must be published and a license applied for within one year after it is approved. (62.0%, N=179)
8. The textbook license goes into effect at the beginning of every semester (i.e., February and August). (67.4%, N=178)
9. Licensed textbooks must be priced by the NICT. (46.6%, N=178)
10. Licensed and published SVS textbooks must clearly show the price set by the NICT. (50.8%, N=179)
11. A licensed and published SVS textbook must include a copy of its license. (77.7%, N=179)

In addition, 53.3% (or 65) of 122 reviewer respondents expressed "no comment" on the current review honorarium NT 5,000 (about US$ 175) for a copy of a textbook manuscript; and 47.2% (or 25) of 53 publisher respondents expressed "no comment" on the current registration fee NT 11,000 (about US$ 380) for a textbook review. The results of two-way χ^2-test on the above 11 items (i.e., Items1 to 11) indicated no significant difference existing between those two groups' opinions on Items 6, 7, and 8 ($p > .05$).

Publishers' and Reviewers' Suggestions on Improving the Review-and-Approval Process

The majority of total respondents positively supported all the following four suggestions (appended is the percentage of the majority and the total number of respondents on this item):

1. All textbook manuscripts of the same subject which is offered for more than one semester must be simultaneously submitted for review. (60.5%, N=177)
2. Textbook manuscripts must be typed for review. (80.2%, N=177)
3. Detailed evaluation criteria must be developed and followed. (56.3%, N=176)

4. All textbook licenses should have the same valid period--four years. (42.4%, N=177)

The results of a two-way χ^2-test on the above four suggestions indicated significant differences between those two groups' opinions on each suggestion ($p < .05$). The majority of reviewers positively responded to all four suggestions, and the majority of publishers negatively responded to Suggestions 1 and 4.

Conclusions and Recommendations

According to the above findings, the following conclusions and recommendations may be made:

1. The current SVS textbook review-and-approval process may be considered appropriate. Because of the different responses between those two groups' opinions on some current policies, dialogue, such as symposiums, between publishers and reviewers and even authors should be fostered.
2. The two suggestions for improving the current review-and-approval process--"textbook manuscripts must be typed for review" and "detailed evaluation criteria must be developed and followed"--should be implemented.
3. The two suggestions for improving the current review-and-approval process--"all textbook manuscripts of the same subject which is offered for more than one semester must be simultaneously submitted for review" and "all textbook licenses should have the same validity (four years)"--may be considered, but a mutual understanding or compromise should be sought between the two groups--reviewers and reviewees/publishers.

References

NICT (1997). Profile of the National Institute for Compilation and Translation. Taipei:Author.

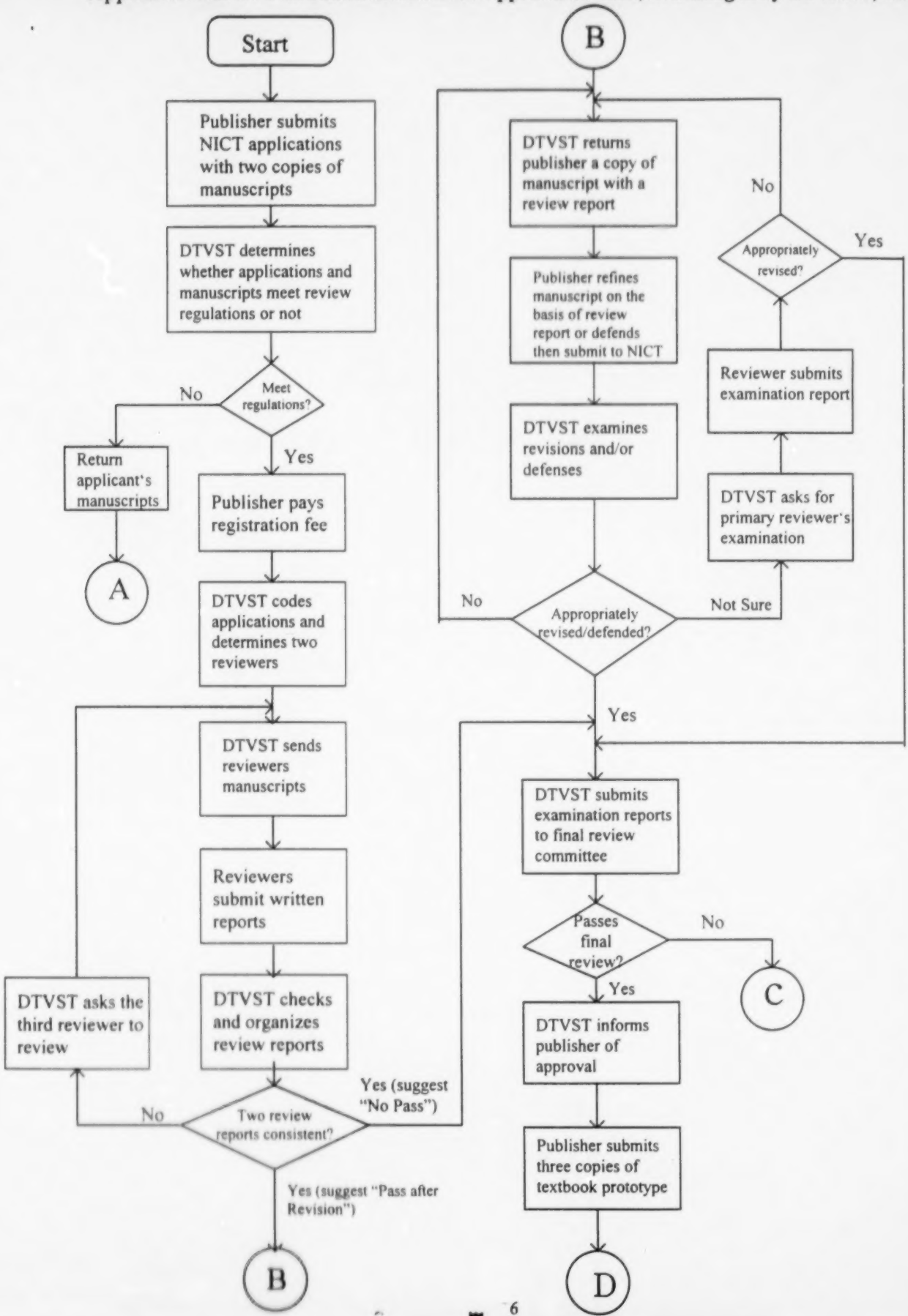
Footnotes

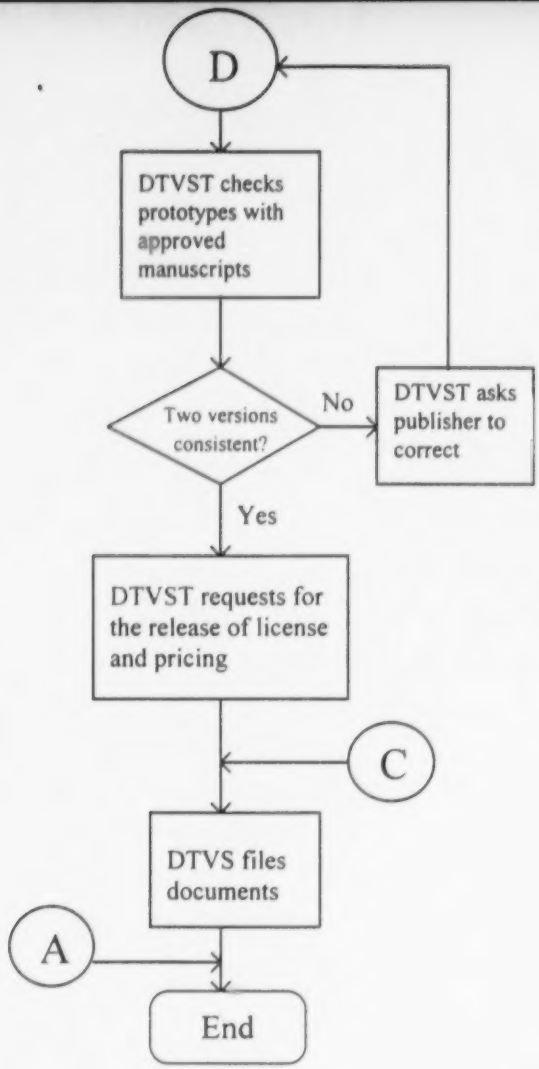
[1] In Taiwan, there are many SVS students. The ratio between the number of students in SVS's at the secondary school level and the number of students in senior high schools is about 7:3.

[2] This part included 12 structured items concerning the current review-and-approval process. Each item invited comments on the scale--Appropriate, No Comment, and Inappropriate.

[3] This part included four possible suggestions for improving the current review-and-approval process with an open-ended question. Each suggestion invited asked for comments on the scale--Appropriate, No Comment, and Inappropriate.

Appendix: **The SVS Textbook Review-and-Approval Process, as Managed by the NICT, MOE**





Legend

DTVST: Department of Technical and Vocational School Textbooks, NICT

NICT: National Institute for Compilation and Translation

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